

UK rail workers demand reinstatement of conductor sacked for opposing Driver Only Operated trains

Our reporter
11 February 2019

Rail workers across the West Midlands Trains (WMT) franchise in the UK have alerted the World Socialist Web Site to a struggle they have initiated to defend a well-respected colleague dismissed on trumped-up charges because he has waged a struggle against the introduction of Driver Only Operated trains (DOO). DOO threaten s the jobs of 500 conductors at WMT, imposing door operation on drivers.

Under advisement, the name of the victimised worker , who is appealing against his dismissal, is not published in this article .

A January 13 aggregate meeting of the Rail, Maritime and Transport workers union (RMT) Bletchley & Northampton branch unanimously passed a resolution demanding strike action to force the reinstatement of ***, a conductor and well-known opponent of plans to introduce Driver Only Operated trains (DOO).

After months of struggle by the rank and file and in the face of growing unrest, the RMT's national executive has agreed to the resolution and committed to being in dispute with the company until *** is reinstated.

According to conductors, *** has been a target by local and senior managers with various trumped up charges put up against him, which conductors saw as calculating attacks as the charges were fought and came to nothing in the end. However, they led to the dismissal of *** in December 2018, a goal which many staff indicated was carried out in order to “get rid of him” before the DOO/DCO (Driver Controlled Operation) implementation starts.

Rail workers across the West Midlands Trains (WMT) rail franchise are opposed to a Framework Agreement signed last June between the RMT and WMT agreeing to private talks to remove door operations from the conductor. Conductors at several other franchises are

striking against DOO.

WMT is run by the European transport giant Abellio, the privatised arm of the Dutch state railways Nederlandse Spoorwegen. It has just removed door operations from conductors and imposed it on drivers at Greater Anglia—one of its three joint franchises in the UK.

The January 13 resolution states that the Bletchley and Northampton branch of the RMT demands “the immediate reinstatement of our brother *** ... suspended since the 8 June 2018 and then dismissed on the 29th December 2018 subject to an appeal hearing...”

It states the belief of RMT members that “management have conspired to discipline *** and have had an ongoing conspiracy against him due to him being a well-known opponent of DOO/DCO [Driver Controlled Operation] and as a former company council rep and trade union activist, of which we believe he has been victimised for his principled stand. An attack on one member is an attack and injury to all. We therefore request W.M.Trains Snr Conductors be balloted for industrial action for the reinstatement of brother ***.”

The victimized conductor is most known for an RMT-sponsored public petition to oppose DOO, which secured thousands of signatures. He played a leading role in opposing the introduction of low-paid security staff by the previous franchise, London Midland, to take over many of the conductors' on-train duties, which was forced back under the threat of industrial action. He also stood alongside other colleagues in other grades to oppose bullying tactics and threatening and intimidating behaviour by managers.

The Framework Agreement between the RMT and West Midlands Trains was agreed on June 7, 2018 and *** was suspended the next day.

New trains being built at factories in Spain and the UK,

to be deployed in 2020 at WMT, are DOO enabled and are said to have at present no facility for the conductor to operate the doors from inside the train.

The January 13 resolution is only the latest effort by rank-and-file members to mount their own defence of *** and to demand the RMT withdraw from all negotiations. At a previous special RMT branch meeting at Northampton & Bletchley on November 2018, a resolution was passed unanimously demanding ***'s reinstatement and an end to the Framework negotiations and appealed over the heads of the RMT company council officials for a unified fight of drivers, conductors and station staff against DOO trains being brought in.

The resolution was thrown out at the next official meeting on November 19 by the company council union officials, amid accusations of personal attacks on them and claims that the special meeting was unconstitutional. However, workers had distributed the resolution galvanising opposition across the WMT franchise.

At the RMT's Coventry No.1 branch, a similar resolution was passed last December, stating, "You may or may not be aware that there has been a case against Brother *** of Bletchley & Northampton branch in which he was suspended from duty on the 8th June 2018. Brother *** is currently still suspended."

His treatment was an attempt "to silence an opposition to the negotiations as he stood up when it counted over the years as local representative and company council."

Both previous resolutions urged an end to negotiations and a turn to a unified struggle to resist the assault on all jobs via DOO.

The resolution from Coventry No. 1 branch said that RMT members were "extremely unhappy at what has been so far agreed as a framework document between West Midlands Trains management, the Senior Conductors Company Council and lead officer as part of the future role of the guards at West Midlands Trains. Our brothers and sisters at Merseyrail, South West Railway and Northern are all bravely taking strike action in defence of the role of the guard. However, the framework agreement that RMT has signed up to states the intention of door controls being taken from guards and being given to drivers. This is clearly against RMT policy which is to oppose DOO and DCO.

"Instead of surrendering the doors without a 'shot being fired' we should instead be fighting like RMT members at the above mentioned TOCs [Train Operating Companies] to defend the role of the guard. If negotiations at WMT result in the RMT volunteering to

hand over control of the doors then this will potentially pull the rug from underneath our brothers and sisters at other companies fighting to defend the role of the guard ...

"This branch also appeals to drivers and station guards for their support through this principled stand. In summary we demand: *These negotiations are immediately suspended until a new framework agreement is created which fully complies with RMT policy. *The Senior Conductors company council and RMT maintain an independent position from WMT management and from now onwards issue their own bulletins and statements to members."

RMT members at Crewe No. 1 branch then passed a resolution demanding mass meetings across the network to determine the membership's position on the Framework negotiations.

The Socialist Equality Party and the WSWS warn rail workers that the RMT bureaucracy cannot be trusted to defend ***, any more than they can to oppose DOO. They are imposing DOO piecemeal across the country, in alliance with big transport companies and the Conservative government which is hell bent on imposing a vast new assault on rail workers jobs, wages and democratic rights.

Last week, the RMT suspended strikes on Northern Rail against DOO, after 47 days of action citing "substantial progress" after the franchise agreed to put a conductor on all trains. This was as Northern Rail cited continuing "talks about what the future role of the conductor looks like" and "operational models moving ahead."

The strivings expressed by conductors for a unified struggle against the transport conglomerates can only be realised through the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade union apparatus. Any conductors, drivers or station staff wishing to organise such an offensive should contact the SEP.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact